

Ellingtonia

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Jack Towers Donates Fargo Discs to Smithsonian

The original 16-inch acetate discs on which the famous recording of the Ellington Orchestra's performance on 7 November 1940 at the Crystal Ballroom in Fargo, ND by two college students, Dick Burris and Jack Towers, have been donated by Towers to the Archives Center of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.

The recordings were received at the Archives Center on 2 February by archivists Reuben Jackson and Wendy Shay from Ted Hudson, whom Jack had asked to deliver them on his behalf. (The Center is also the home of the Duke Ellington Collection.)



Ted Hudson, Behind-the-Scenes Volunteer; Craig Orr, Acquisitions Archivist; Wendy Shay, Deputy Chair; and Deborra Richardson, Chair, Archives Center

Deborra Richardson, Chair of the Center, says, "The Archives Center staff was happy and pleased to receive the Fargo, North Dakota transcription discs from Jack Towers. Jack, who contributed greatly to the annals of jazz, has been a long term member of the Ellington Society and a great friend to the Archives Center at the National Museum of American History."

Burns died in 1971, before either of them realized how historic their recording was to be. When the young men asked the William Morris Agency for permission

Clark Terry Videos At Our March Meeting

by Peter MacHare, Program Coordinator

Ted Shell will be presenting an all-video program featuring Clark Terry at our March meeting. Ted has a wonderful collection of videos, so you are sure to see many fine performances that you haven't seen before. Clark Terry is one of the finest musicians and gentlemen to grace the American music scene, so be sure not to miss this program.

We will meet at 7:00 pm on Saturday, March 7 at **Grace Lutheran Church, 16th and Varnum Streets, NW, Washington, DC.**

Our meetings are open to the public, so come and enjoy the music with us!

to record the event, it was granted with the stipulations that Duke would have to agree and that the recording not be used for commercial purposes. Jack later recounted that he had dubbed a tape for a guy to listen to but who gave it to somebody else and it "popped up in bootleg form" in Europe "and that was that."

The first official release was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection in 1978 as *Duke Ellington at Fargo, 1940 Live*, for which Jack did the masters. Among later releases was a *Special 60th Anniversary Edition* boxed set by Storyville in 2000.

When Duke gave his permission, he advised Dick and Jack that the trumpets were in "bad shape," Cootie having just left leaving just Rex Stewart and Wallace Jones in the section and replacement Ray Nance having joined a day or so before Fargo. Further, when the two young engineers had to change discs, some of the music was lost, as it was when they had to pick up vocalists' solos.

Regardless, what they recorded proved classic. Further, it was a fortuitous night for Jack, personally. During intermission, Ben Webster asked them to put on

(Continued on page 3 under "Fargo Discs")

Harlem Airshaft: The Music of Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn by the Alan Barnes Octet

(Woodville Records WWCD122)

Reviewed by Theodore R. Hudson

While well known as an Ellington devotee, Barnes and his cohorts should not be considered a repertory band. Rather, they interpret and otherwise transform Duke's and Billy's music. For example, an over nine-minute "Take the Duke Train" starts as an 'A' Train but has side trips, transfers, unexpected, short lay-bys (at a medical center, at a prom, to chase a bunny rabbit, to admire a doll, etc.)—affording each of the engineers/solists his own route to, yes, Harlem. "Snibor" is another such extended work. While it suggests the original's full-orchestra texture, it's a vehicle for Wood's trombone and Coe's tenor sax. On the other hand, shorter, up-tempo "Battle Royal" and a jaunty "Second Line" both show off several soloists, all of whom play with spirit, imagination, and admirable technique. While well regarded Tony Faulkner is credited with all arrangements, these two tunes hew fairly close to the originals.

This band can play pretty, as well. "Black Butterfly" is given a sensitively flitting, albeit at times forceful, reading by trumpeter Adams over instrumental humming. "Sunswept Sunday," from *Anatomy of a Murder*, is a lovely tune that serves as a meditative, wistful concerto of sorts for clarinetist Coe, while "Fife," a waltz, serves the same purpose for Panayi's graceful flute. Trombonist Wood plays a beddy-bye lullaby on "Tonight I Shall Sleep," with an alto sax interlude by Barnes. And pretty is as pretty does: Barnes plays a light, all-lyricism alto on Strayhorn's "Brown Penny."

The titular piece offers new—well, let's face it, a "Harlem Airshaft" ain't what it used to be. Thus, in a gentrified one, expect maybe brie, not barbecue and maybe "world music," not the blues, etc. Pianist Horley, trumpeter Adams, and Coe provide these different but no less acute sensory impressions. The CDs closer, "La Plus Belle Africaine," is introduced by Coe's drums, followed by some new orchestration in support of Horley, Dankwoth, and Smith.

In anticipation of a major music association's annual awards competition, its project administrator has raised the issue of taking a closer look at "many superb musicians who seem to fall under the radar every year," as if a demarcation line runs halfway between the Americas and Europe. One responder wonders who are the Europeans to bring forward for consideration. Well, let's see—Alan Barnes simply must be included in any serious discussion or poll of today's significant jazz artists. Twice he has been designated "Best Instrumentalist" in the BBC Jazz Awards. In Marston's Pedigree British Awards he has won on alto sax and clarinet five times and on baritone sax three times.

And then there's this CD, *Harlem Airshaft* by the Alan Barnes Octet!

Stepping Into Swing Society and Colors in Rhythm by Mercer Ellington and His Orchestra

(Fresh Sound FSR-CD-531 and Coral LPs CRL 57225-1958 and CRL 57293-1959)

Reviewed by Bob Reny

Although Fresh Sound titled its CD with only one of the two Mercer Coral LPs, it contains both. I know that many members have the original LPs kicking around in their collections, but here's a chance to hear them again without pops and crackles. I'm afraid, however, that the first album, *Steppin'* remains the one with credible performances and the second, *Colors*, is still a collection of mediocre performances, despite the presence of all star performers.

Jazz writer-critic George T. Simon captured Mercer Ellington (1919-1996) in one line: "a quiet handsome, talented man who lived in the shadow of his father's brilliancy." These two albums were cut when Mercer was trying to carve his own niche in the jazz world, before he became his father's road manager and intermittent member of band's brass section in 1964. Both bands were assembled for recording purposes and, as far as I know, never toured as road bands, although some of the personnel may have played in the band Mercer took into Birdland in 1959.

Mercer's band in *Steppin'* sounds like an Ellington band, but it has a lighter, more pointed attack, probably due to its deft rhythm section and inventive arrangements. Inclusion of a guitarist, which his father dropped in 1949 and never replaced, also gave this band a different sound. "Got My Foot in the Door" and "Ruint" have the sections shuffling along, prodded by some accented drumming; Hodges is featured on "Indelible," backed by unique section fingerings; "Afternoon Moon" is taken at an easy pace with well structured solos, and Carney is soulful on "Yearning for Love." Except for "Frolic Sam" by Williams, all the tunes are by an Ellington, father or son.

The *Colors* band, however, doesn't sound like Ellington, delivering its selections in gaudy, cliché ridden settings, often sounding like the five and dime bands that play society dates. It's hard to imagine that veteran Ellington musicians got involved in such a shallow endeavor. "Mood Indigo" with Hamilton is passable, but the other selections are lackluster, with "Cherry Pink (And Apple Blossom White)" and "The Moon Was Yellow" just awful. Mercer will do much better when he takes over the Ellington Orchestra

(Continued on page 3 under Stepping and Colors)

Short Sheets . . .

♩ JJA's Newsletter Available on Web ♩

The Jazz Journalists Association's *Jazz Notes* can now be accessed online at www.jazzhouse.org as a PDF file.

♩ Schaap's Store Closed ♩

Jazz authority Phil Schaap's unusual gift shop at the Lincoln Center in NYC has been replaced by a Borders facility. Schaap's was unusual in that it offered, in addition to expected fare, autographed CDs and books, rare recordings and other devotees's treasures. A firm called True Blue Music, which can be accessed online, now offers some of his collectibles.

Q & A

In our last issue under the headline beginning "Attention Itinerarists....," Brian Gilmore wondered whether Clark Terry was in the band during an engagement in Atlanta when blacks allegedly were to be relegated to enter by the back doors until an official intercession.

In response, Sjef Hoefsmit has written, "The date of the concert was 26Oct51 and Clark Terry came in the band on 11Nov51. He wasn't there in Atlanta."

Fargo Discs *(Continued from page 1)*

a fresh disc so as to catch all of an arrangement that he and bassist Jimmie Blanton had worked up on "Star Dust." The result was something special. That was the beginning of a lifelong friendship of Ben and Jack, which intensified when Ben was living in Washington, DC before leaving to rejoin the band at a Carnegie Hall concert in November 1948

At the time of the 60th anniversary release, Jack wrote, "When Dick and I recorded this Fargo performance, we did dit just for the excitement and pleasure of it all. We had no idea that people all over the world would be listening to it 60 years later."

Well, Jack, it's generations later and more and more are experiencing and re-experiencing "the excitement and pleasure of it all."

Stepping and Colors *(Continued from page 2)*

upon his father's death, even getting a Grammy Award in 1988 for the best jazz instrumental album, *Digital Duke*.

Mercer rightly will be remembered for his two decades of leading the Ellington Orchestra, even though it slowly disappeared like some jazz Cheshire cat, leaving its face but no body. He will not be remembered for these two embryonic albums.

Personnel

Harlem Airshaft: Bruce Adams (tp, figlhrn), Andy Wood (slide & piston tb), Tony Coe (ts, ax, cl), Andy Panayi (bs, cl, fl), John Horler (p), Alec Dankworth (b), Mike Smith (d), Tony Faulkner (arr), Alan Barnes (ldr, as, cl, bass cl).

Stepping Into Swing Society: Cat Anderson, Harold Baker, Clark Terry (tp), Quentin Jackson, Britt Woodman, John Sanders (tb), Johnny Hodges, Russell Procope (as), Jimmy Hamilton (ts, cl), Ben Webster (ts), Harry Carney (bar), Jimmy Jones (p), Skeeter Best, Carl Lynch (g), Wendell Marshall, George Duvivier (b), Joe Marshall, Sam Bailey (d), Mercer Ellington (ldr, arr).

Colors in Rhythm: Cat Anderson, Harold Baker, Clark Terry (tp), Quentin Jackson, Britt Woodman, John Sanders (tb), Jimmy Hamilton (ts, cl), Russell Procope (as, Japanese fl), Johnny Hodges (as), Harold Ashby (ts), Harry Carney (bar), Jimmy Jones (p), Les Spann (g, fl), Wendell Marshall (b), Gus Johnson (d), Mercer Ellington (ldr).

DEMS Bulletins Now Complete Online!

Just think—Two millennia of *DEMS Bulletins*, 1979-2000 are now available online in PDF format. These PDF files are through the courtesy of Bjorn F. Andresen. The *Bulletins* from 2001-present have already been published in HTML format. Both of these sets may be accessed at www.depanorama.net/dems/.

The current issue, December 2008-March 2009, marks the 30th year of this invaluable publication. Congratulations, Sjef Hoefsmit!

"Duke had it . . ."

The atmosphere [in Washington, DC] was softly, insinuatingly urban [and] imposed a certain dignity upon those colored youngsters which no other group of jazzmen ever possessed. Duke had it, of course, so had Otto Hardwick, the Miller brothers, Bill Escoffery, Claude Hopkins, Arthur Whetsol, Elmer Snowden, Rex Stewart, all the musicians who were born or bred in the capital; they had it, they have it.. There was a certain Washington pattern; it involved a certain bearing, a respect for education, for the broad principles of the art of music, a desire for order, for design, in the professional lives.

— Barry Ulanov in *Duke Ellington*

Looking Ahead

Sunday, 1 March, 4 pm

Concert of Sacred Music of Duke Ellington

Peoples UCC Chancel Choir & Blues Alley Youth Orchestra
Peoples Congregational UCC, 4704 - 13th St, NW, DC
\$15 in advance, \$20 at door

14 and 15 March

Prez Fest: Celebrating Billy Strayhorn

St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave at 54th St, NYC
Free, \$20 suggested donation for Concert, 7:00 pm 15 March

15-17 April

Echoes of Ellington Conference

Sponsors: U. of Texas at Austin and Butler School of Music
For details: www.music.utexas.edu/echoesofellington

"Dramatis Felidae" (To Use Our Man's Term from MIMM) About Our Members

Alan Schneidmill

At the start of his Sunday, 2-4pm show on WPFW-FM 89.6, Donnie McKethan usually includes Alan Schneidmill's name along with those of several apparently special listeners.

Harvey Cohen

We were about to recommend that our Society impeach Harvey Cohen. There's not a single Ellington or Strayhorn album on his "The Harvman's Fave Albums of 2008," published recently online. Then we had a second thought when we noticed the word "new" among the criteria. But now we have a third thought: Isn't Duke's and Billy's music perennially "new?" HmMMMM.

By the way, Dr. Harvey served as a commentator on Britain's BBC Radio 5 Live coverage of the inauguration of Barak Obama.

The Answers Are

The Two Theme Songs That Duke Used

1. "East St. Louis Toodle-oo"
2. "Take the 'A' Train"

And the Winnahs Are: Tah—Dah!

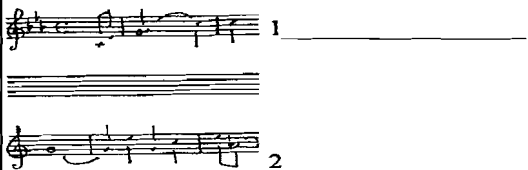
Alan Schneidmill

Richard "Dick" Spottswood

Both correctly identified the first, but not the second, so they get a "Tah" but not the "Dah!"

No Matter: Congratulations, Alan and Dick!

Name These Tunes



Courtesy Ellington Collection,
Archives Center, NMAH

First five responders who correctly identify these well-known pieces will gain fame, albeit without fortune, by way of announcement in our next issue. Send your answers to our e-mail or snail-mail address.

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PO Box 15591, Washington, DC 20003, USA.

Our dues remain a bargain:

Member, \$30; Couple, \$50; Student, \$5;

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Keep in mind that memberships are for the calendar year.

A Suite February Meeting

by Art Luby, Secretary

The February meeting featured a very fine presentation by Peter MacHare on Ellington/ Strayhorn suites. Ellington experimented with extended compositions throughout his career, but the suites constituted the most significant portion of the orchestra's creative output in the post-Newport era. These works were always a vehicle for experimentation and required a higher degree of commitment and concentration from listeners to appreciate. Because of this the suites met with significant resistance from critics who often found them pretentious, complicated, or inferior to the maestro's more accessible contributions to the Great American Songbook. One of his earliest, "Reminiscing in Tempo," was panned by no less than John Hammond as a musical disaster.

Fortunately, neither Ellington nor Strayhorn was discouraged by any of this, and Peter's presentation illustrated how fortunate we are that they continued to work in this format. He played some 19 selections from suites composed throughout Ellington's and Strayhorn's careers, some of which I had heard, some not. I was familiar with selections from later critically acclaimed suites such as the moving "Portrait of Sidney Bechet" from *New Orleans Suite* and the lovely "Mount Harrissa" from *Far East Suite*. However, I had never heard "Dancers in Love" from *The Perfume Suite* or any movement of the *The Queen's Suite*. Both were memorable achievements and works of the first order which reward the listener's commitment and willingness to stray from the familiar.

Those present at the well attended February meeting were also rewarded by Peter's research and interest in exploring this crucial portion of the Ellington legacy.

Correction: In my notes of the January meeting I incorrectly stated that Patricia Willard had organized Ellington's First Sacred Concert in San Francisco. She actually produced this concert, a matter she revealed at the New Year's party only upon inquiry from Ted Hudson.

THE DUKE ELLINGTON SOCIETY, INC.

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